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RUEHVEN/USMISSION VIENNA PRIORITY 0003
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OSD FOR FLORY, NSC FOR BRAUN AND HINNEN, DOJ FOR FBIHQ, DHS
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SUBJECT: BOSNIA: BOSNIAKS MORE SENSITIVE ABOUT U.S.
COUNTERTERRORISM POLICIES

REF: A. 05 SARAJEVO 2930 B. SARAJEVO 2072 C. SARAJEVO
2042

Classified By: DCM Judith B. Cefkin. Reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

11. (S) SUMMARY: In the past, Bosniak (i.e., Muslim) politicians and the Bosniak public have been strong supporters of U.S. counterterrorism policies. This includes the work of the Citizenship Review Commission (CRC), one of our top counterterrorism priorities in Bosnia. Criticism of the CRC generally came from extremists, whom Bosniak officials and the general public largely ignored. For several reasons, the atmosphere has deteriorated over the past several months. First, during the recent election campaign, Bosniak politics shifted markedly to the right, with Bosniak candidates often seeking to establish their Muslim credentials by criticizing U.S. and GBiH counterterrorism initiatives, including the CRC. Second, radical Muslims, including associates of former mujaheddin (the CRC's target), are now better organized and more adept at shaping public debate. Third, the screening of "The Road to Guantanamo" at the Sarajevo Film Festival renewed local debate about the "Algerian Six," including more widespread condemnation of U.S. policies. The radicals' aim appears to be to turn the "Algerian Six" into a Bosniak cause celebre and link this case to other initiatives, particularly the CRC, in order to discredit them. Growing sympathetic attention to the "Algerian Six" from outside Bosnia has indirectly aided their cause. This controversy has the potential to become on-going irritant in USG-GBiH relations and to hamper cooperation on other important bilateral issues, particularly the CRC. With this in mind, it would be helpful if Washington could provide early warning to Post when there are major developments in cases involving the "Algerian Six" before they become public. END SUMMARY.

Background: "Algerian Six," CRC

12. (S) In January 2002, the BiH government rendered Algerian nationals (Belkacem BENSAYAH, Hadj BOUDELLA, Lakhdar BOUMEDIENE, Mustafa Ait IDIR, Sabar LAHMAR and Mohamed NECHLA) to U.S. authorities. All claim Bosnian citizenship and are being held as enemy combatants in the Guantanamo Bay detention facility. The six are linked to the radical Algerian terrorist organization GIA (Armed Islamic Group),

and suspected of plotting terrorist acts in Bosnia. Though U.S. counterterrorism policies, including U.S. detention policies at Guantanamo Bay, have been the subject of widespread criticism within Europe, the vast majority of Bosnians, including Bosniaks (i.e., Bosnian Muslims), have shown little critical interest in these policies or the "Algerian Six." The absence of sustained, serious public criticism has helped maintain a favorable political climate for cooperation with Bosnian authorities on a range of counterterrorism priorities, including the Citizenship Review Commission's work. The CRC was established in January 2006. Its mandate is to remove BiH citizenship from former mujaheddin, or foreign fighters, who obtained it improperly following the 1992-95 war (Ref. A). (Note: The CRC is reviewing the citizenship claims of the "Algerian Six," and we are told that there is a high likelihood that at least some will have their citizenship stripped. End Note)

Mainstream Bosniak Politics Shifts Right

13. (C) Bosniak public attitudes towards the "Algerian Six" and the CRC have become perceptibly more skeptical in recent months. During the recent election campaign, Haris Silajdzic, now President-elect for the Bosniak member of the Tri-Presidency, ran an overtly nationalist campaign. Though Silajdzic built his campaign around an anti-constitutional reform message, a key subtext was that he and his party were "better Muslims" than their opponents and would better protect Bosnia's Muslims from outside threats. These messages resonated and traditionally moderate Bosniak politicians felt compelled to beef up their Bosniak credentials by, among other things, criticizing the

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government's handling of the "Algerian Six" and attacking the CRC. One immediate consequence for the U.S. counterterrorism agenda was a reluctance by Bosniak members of Parliament to adopt an amendment to the Law on Citizenship that would close a loophole that, if left open, could undercut the CRC's work and GBiH efforts to ensure the most dangerous foreigner fighters are deported from Bosnia (Ref. B). With the election behind them, Silajdzic and his opponents may steer Bosniak politics back to the center, but how long this process might take is unclear. Right now, moderate Bosniaks are shell-shocked and reluctant to support policies that could be construed as "anti-Muslim."

Radicals Elevate Their Public Profile

14. (C) As electoral dynamics drove Bosniak politics to the right, radicals, including advocates for the mujaheddin, made more frequent and sophisticated efforts to advance their agenda, particularly raising the public profile of the "Algerian Six" and discrediting the CRC. Nadja Dizdarevic, the wife of Hadj Boudella and an outspoken advocate for the "Algerian Six," joined the hard right People's Bosniak Party, and ran for a seat in the Federation Parliament. Though unsuccessful, her campaign gave radicals a new platform for their extremist rhetoric. Abu Hamza (aka Immad Hussien aka Imad Al-Husin), the radical Muslim community's self-proclaimed spokesman, sought to exploit public confusion about the citizenship review process by mounting a public campaign that erroneously linked the renditions of the "Algerian Six" to the CRC. The deportation of Tunisian national (but non-BiH citizen) Bedrudin el Ferchichi (aka Abu Malik) in late August gave Hamza's campaign fresh impetus, even though the CRC had nothing to do with it (Ref. C). Hamza, Dizdarevic and others lambasted politicians for supporting policies that they claimed violated Muslims' human rights. The day before the national elections Abu Hamza and about 300 parents and children of mujaheddin protested against the CRC in downtown Sarajevo marching under banners with slogans such as "do not take away my daddy." The Road to Guantanamo Stops in Sarajevo

15. (C) Michael Winterbottom's film "The Road to Guantanamo" has also had a powerful impact on Bosniak public perception of U.S. counterterrorism policies and the continued detention of the "Algerian Six." The film was screened at the 2006 Sarajevo Film Festival, received a standing ovation from over 6,000 people, and won the audience favorite award. It then ran for almost 6 weeks at Sarajevo's premier cinema, an unprecedented time for a foreign movie. The film contained graphic depictions of detainees experiencing short shackling, sensory deprivation and over-stimulation, and confrontational interrogations. These images have powerfully shaped Bosniak discussion of the "Algerian Six," whose "plight" is now referred to more frequently by media outlets. The images also raised public concern about deportations, particularly those related to the CRC's work, and warnings about the dangers of deporting individuals to countries where they might be tortured.

16. (C) Winterbottom and the "Tipton Three," the protagonists of "The Road to Guantanamo," also attended the Sarajevo Film Festival. They used their appearances to criticize the Bosnian government's failure to pursue the release of the "Algerian Six," and to call upon Bosnians to mount a public campaign to secure their freedom. Efforts from outside Bosnia to elevate the profile of the "Algerian Six" continued after the film festival. Most notably on September 27, when a Boston-based U.S. law firm filed suit against the GBiH in the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) on behalf of Boumediene. The suit, which has attracted widespread attention in Bosnia, asks the Court to compel the BiH government to pursue all necessary diplomatic efforts to return him to Bosnia. According to press reports, similar suits on behalf of the other five men will be filed as well.

Comment: A Little Help

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17. (S) Diffusing political opposition to the CRC is critical to our counterterrorism goals in Bosnia. The tilt to the right in Bosniak politics, the increasing sophistication of some radical Muslims, and the growing public profile of the "Algerian Six" case makes this more difficult than it has been in the past. In our private conversations with Bosnian politicians - Bosniak, Serb, and Croat - we have urged them not to politicize the CRC or the "Algerian Six," or to fall into the trap set for them by the radicals and link the two issues. Our public comments on the CRC have generally stressed that all governments, including the U.S., take measures to prevent and punish fraud in the citizenship and naturalization process, as well as the legitimacy of government action to provide for the security of its citizens. In Post's estimation, no benefit will result from engaging locally on the broader Guantanamo debate. However, we will continue to proactively de-link the citizenship review process from the "Algerian Six." Our aim is to prevent the "Algerian Six" from becoming an on-going irritant in U.S.-BiH relations or from negatively impacting other important bilateral counterterrorism initiatives. With this in mind, it would be useful if Washington could provide early warning to Post when there are major developments in cases involving the "Algerian Six" before they become public.
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